

JUN 16 1937

DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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DRAMA

VOL 15

JUNE, MCMXXXVII

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By A. E. Wilson

NO doubt the Coronation and the preparations for it laid a paralysing hand upon theatrical enterprise during the past month. One cannot otherwise account for the thinness of the output in what, in normal years, represents the busiest period of the season. Yet can the Coronation be held to blame also for the lack of quality and interest in most of the plays that were produced?

The best production and the greatest success of the month was Gordon Sherry's "Black Limelight" which, as anticipated by my colleague, Mr. W. A. Darlington who noticed the play at its original production at the "Q" Theatre, was quickly snapped up for the West-end.

It will no doubt be a big success at the St. James's for Margaret Rawlings, who plays the nerve-racked wife of the hunted murder-suspect, has the part of her career, investing it with her glamorous personality and with considerable emotional variety. It is a long time since a part so rich in emotional opportunities has been conferred upon any actress. Miss Rawlings brings off a spectacular "double" for she not only plays the character of the astonishingly magnanimous wife but that of her rival, the common light o' love who gets murdered and so provides the play with its mystery. The characters are most cleverly differentiated by her. The play itself lacks plausibility but it is not without ingenuity and it offers a welcome change in form from most murder mysteries.

The only other play of genuine interest during the month was "The Great Romancer" by the American playwright Jules Eckert Goodman which the Repertory Players (who

have been doing some worthy work of late) produced for a solitary Sunday evening performance. It will be surprising if this remarkably entertaining biographical piece, written round that extraordinary flamboyant personality, Alexandre Dumas, author of "The Three Musketeers" and hundreds of other novels, does not find West-end production.

Showing us Dumas leading a whirlwind existence, surrounded by duns and bailiffs, literary "ghosts", spongers, odd domestic functionaries and quarrelling mistresses, it is an excellent blend of comedy and sentiment seasoned with wit. It shows Dumas in prosperity and decline and introduced Adah Isaacs Menken among its picturesque characters. Yet were the play about any imaginary writer or about no one in particular instead of Dumas it would hold one's interest.

Dumas was superbly played by Robert Morley who not long ago gave such a remarkable impersonation of Oscar Wilde at the Gate Theatre. It is long since a play so held me or since I was so delighted by a piece of acting.

It is agreeable to encounter A. A. Milne in the theatre again. His "Sarah Simple" at the Garrick is an example of his art of making something out of nothing. It is slight, frothy and amusing. One cares little about his characters in this variation upon the familiar triangle theme; one does not believe in anything that happens—yet one is pleasantly entertained all the time. The humour is innocuous and in perfect taste. Charm and unreality rule undisturbed throughout the piece in which Leonora Corbett, Agnes Lauchlan and A. R. Whatmore disport themselves, with Frederick Piper adding a diverting picture of a dismal

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

waiter whose only pleasure is in reading the goriest of detective novels.

Mr. Ashley Dukes' little Mercury Theatre, temporarily desisting from the poetic drama, presented Lenormand's "In Theatre Street" which expresses with pointed satire and fantasy a plea for the preservation of the living theatre with shrewd hits at the follies and stupidities of Hollywood. A dramatist could hardly perform better service to his art than to present such a telling criticism of modern tendencies.

Of the rest of the plays so entirely undistinguished were they that little can be said of them.

"Post Road," a "thriller" which—it is difficult to see why—ran for many months in New York achieved almost instantaneous failure upon its production with a half-American cast at the Globe. There is some fundamental difference in the respective tastes of New York and London playgoers and there are also conditions in the American scene so utterly foreign to us as to be almost incomprehensible. This partly accounts for the failure of "Post Road" to which may be added the unpleasant nature of its kidnapping theme and the unfunny of its humour.

Dr. Noel Scott gave in "And the Music Stopped" at the New, another "spot the murderer" play. I am rather tired myself of acting the detective in the stalls and I rarely care who murdered whom. But there are others who still take pleasure in the game of guessing and they may be able, more than I, to enjoy the complexities of this piece and to believe in what is supposed to happen on the stage.

Hungary is reputed to be full of brilliant playwrights but they have little luck on the English stage. Ferenc Molnar's "The Good Fairy" at the Royalty is yet another example of our failure to capture the real quality of a playwright of acknowledged eminence. This fantasy suffered from dullness of dialogue, and from a woodenness in the acting. It cannot have fairly represented the author.

Daisy Fisher's "A Ship Comes Home" at the St. Martin's owed much in its story about the rabble in an untidy boarding-house to the delightful art of comedy of Laura Cowie who was superb as the blowsy and petulant owner of the establishment. One can only regard the Embassy's production of "The New School for Scandal," an up-to-date rewriting of Sheridan, as a mistake.

SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

WRITING in the town of Shakespeare's birthplace gaily decorated with flags of 50 nations and filled with representative visitors from all parts one wonders how many more pilgrims will visit Stratford between now and the 25th September, the closing date of this year's prolonged Shakespeare Festival. During such time no pilgrimage is complete without witnessing the plays presented in the Memorial Theatre and having completed the cycle of eight plays chosen for the first thirteen weeks' repertoire it should be interesting to note in reflection the high lights of the Festival.

By way of courtesy one thinks of the guest-producer's plays first. Mr. E. Martin Browne's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is not completely new inasmuch as Norman Wilkinson's scenery and costumes designed for a former revival are still used. They are so delightful, however, and give such a fresh romantic atmosphere to the comedy that one is glad to see them again. Poetry and romance are stressed most and the comica are kept well in the background with rather less chances for broad comedy than usual. Since the opening performance of Mr. H. K. Ayllif's "Merry Wives of Windsor" this production has been speeded up to an amazing degree and now Baloli Hollaway (Falstaff), Donald Layne-Smith (Doctor Cains), Joyce Bland (Mistress Ford), and Valerie Tudor (Mistress Page), rattle through their impudent pranks with great zest.

Renewed acquaintance with Komisarjevsky's "King Lear" (a big box-office draw last year) enables one to appreciate more to the full the spaceless and infinite qualities of this production. Randle Ayrton gives again a vivid performance as the King and the supporting cast is much stronger and better balanced than last year.

And now for the work, always most sincere, of Mr. B. Iden Payne, the Director who in "Henry V," "As You Like It," "Cymbeline," "Hamlet," and "A Winter's Tale" (Birthday Play) has broken away somewhat from his strong adherence to Elizabethan bias, a wise move upon a stage which offers such great scope. "Henry V" is a virile production full of pageantry and colour. Clement McCallin, a newcomer, makes a fine upstanding Henry who can overtop his comrades without letting the fiery speeches run away with him. Donald Wolfitt weaves the scenes together perfectly with good round speaking as chorus.

"As You Like It" has exquisite garden and orchard scenes and delicately beautiful costume designs by Barbara Heseltine. "Cymbeline" is one of the finest productions one could wish to see. Mr. J. Gower Park's permanent setting has a sense of mobility and masonic dignity combined, until the Welsh mountains are introduced into the centre arch! It is extremely well cast with Baloli Hollaway doing his best work in the Festival as Cloten.

"Hamlet" has Randle Ayrton's dignified settings of last year in which Donald Wolfitt repeats his sound performance as the Prince. Valerie Tudor, who is very good in every part she undertakes this year, is a very satisfactory Ophelia freed from the irritations which tradition has thrust upon the part.

For all plays the incidental music is composed and arranged by Anthony Bernard, and the choreography arranged by Rosalind Iden.

W. BUSHILL-MATTHEWS.

THE SCHOOL DRAMA CONFERENCE

At the invitation of the "Drama in Schools" Committee, a conference was held at the Florence Restaurant Rupert Street, London, W., on Saturday, April 10th, to discuss the general position of Drama in the Schools and the possibility of achieving a higher standard of dramatic work in schools either by the holding of dramatic festivals or by other means. There were two sessions, from 10.30 a.m. to 1 p.m., and from 2.30 p.m. to 4 p.m., and over 70 school representatives were present.

Mr. Guy Boas, Chairman of the Committee, presided, and in his opening speech pointed out that the conference was representative of schools in all parts of the country and also included an Australian delegate. It had been called in order that the committee might hear the views of those attending and not for the adoption of any ready-made schemes. Drama in the Schools was in the nature of pioneer work. It was only, roughly speaking, since the War that drama had taken its terrific hold both in the country and in the schools, and only in that period that in any large number of schools dramatic work had been done so thoroughly and seriously that it deserved serious backing and consideration by the educationist.

The present position, Mr. Boas said, was confused, and that was why the Council of the League had set up a Committee to help towards getting things into more definite shape. Dramatic work was still treated as "play," a term that was hardly appropriate when a girl or boy was trying to play Molière, Rostand or Shakespeare. As the subject was not examined in any of the leaving examinations for the general school pupil, time could not be devoted to it to any great extent—in public or secondary schools it was given hardly any time—during the school curriculum hours. Therefore teachers were doubtful how far the energy required by the work was well spent. The desire of educational authorities was that drama should prosper and increase. The President of the Board of Education had spoken with approval, in the House of Commons, of the debating society, the school library, and the school play, and a deputation had recently pointed out to the Board that if some official memorandum to this effect could be sent round to schools to show that the work was regarded as most desirable, the qualms of those in the schools who liked the work would be assuaged.

Another difficulty was the lack of standard. In many schools, both rich and poor, performances were admirable; in many others they were fair, and could have been much better if certain things were done. Almost everything depended on the producer. If they were to do anything about standard it was the problem of the producer that they must tackle. Ideally, one should have a professional on the staff, as in music, art, and other subjects. Drama was now at the point where English had been twenty or thirty years ago. But the ideal was a long way ahead, and, after all, they did not want the children trained in the technique which the adult player needed.

He asked the conference to explore this "jungle, full of fascination and beauty and danger."

Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth said that the British Drama League had from its commencement been interested in this particular branch of the theatre. About 1921 Mr. Granville-Barker, with himself and two others had formed a deputation to Mr. Fisher, then President of the Board of Education, and as a result more stress was laid by the Board on the desirability of appropriate training in drama in the training colleges. The Education Committee of the League felt that the chances were now very favourable if the rank and file of teachers and enthusiasts would see that the background of sympathy that had been created was utilized for a practical move forward. The League believed that drama was a most valuable factor in the education of children and that unless something was done to make our children more drama-minded when young the theatre of tomorrow might find itself in a very precarious situation. Many people thought Shakespeare an admirable person, but dull to watch. If a child had been shown, or had acted in, a play, that attitude was impossible. It was the responsibility of both parents and teachers to introduce Shakespeare to the child in such a manner that he would from that moment regard the theatre as a delightful place, and better—far better—than the cinema.

Mr. Holland (Manchester Grammar School) said that they had to get clear what they were aiming at: it was not the production of professional actors. First, they wanted to improve the standard of English speech, and

THE SCHOOL DRAMA CONFERENCE

secondly, to give the children some sense of presence, ability to appear before an audience and to move freely. There were 1,200 boys in his school, and it was undesirable to have them all taking part in the school play, even if they remained seven years. But it was possible to have small plays going on in school rooms which were not intended for public production. Too much publicity was bad for children, and for that reason the element of competition should be kept out.

The chairman pointed out that at present dramatics could not be done in school hours. There was no time for it. But he wondered whether some kind of test in speaking might not be added to the existing English paper.

Miss Doddery (Berkhamsted School for Girls) said that three-quarters of the value of the work had been that the girls had done it voluntarily. If it was made part of the school certificate examination the shy child would suffer agonies.

Miss Sheldon (Luton High School) asked whether they were to have a few picked out for the school play. She liked to let anyone who liked take part, and sometimes had as many as 400 in one play, though sometimes that meant writing a play. She would welcome the visit of critics from the Drama League. A school play approximated to work in the class room, and children who had been taking part in dramatic entertainments during the year generally did far better in the school certificate examinations.

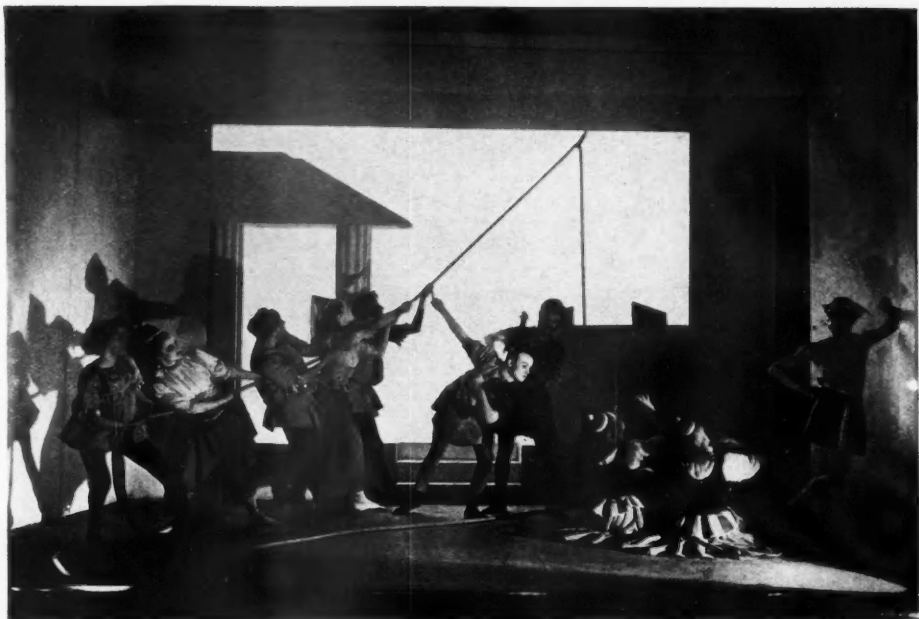
Mr. Dyer (Heaton Secondary School, Newcastle), said he was doubtful about the value to individuals of speech-training through dramatic work on the stage, as the amount of time that could be given there especially to 400 children, was obviously limited. Speech-training more properly belonged to the classroom. The main educational value of dramatic work was the sense it gave of co-operative effort by all the members of a play. Not only those acting on the stage, but those working behind, at the switchboard and the like, were all part of a team. It was a great problem whether you would turn a boy against Shakespeare or towards him by putting the plays on the school stage, or by taking him to a second-rate professional performances. Dramatic work in the class room should be kept distinct from dramatic work on the stage, where a particular play was being dealt with for a particular purpose.

Mr. Whitworth commented that it was the bad dull teaching of Shakespeare which had put off many from love of the drama. But most children, in the old days, at any rate, were glad to see a Shakespeare play by almost any company. He did not agree that performances had to be of the highest standard to interest the child—unless, indeed, the cinema had so vitiated his taste that he now demanded something more than was human.

Miss Gulick, Secretary of the Central School for Speech-Training and Dramatic Art, said that the subject was not new, for in the nineties, many schools were making the school play a definite feature. The vital question was who was to conduct the plays. The supreme object of the school play was the training in speech and movement. The old elocution, which meant speaking as loud as possible to be audible, was very nearly dead. The one year certificate of London University, which had been introduced in 1928 to meet the needs of teachers who did not aim at being specialists but required a working knowledge of the subject, cost £29, and could be taken at any of the schools recognised by the university. This certificate and the diploma solved the question who was to train the children. The movement for drama in the school before them to-day would prove disastrous rather than valuable if they did not lay the greatest possible stress on the training of the teachers. They needed specialists for that as for any other subject, and the demand would create the supply.

Miss Hewins, of the Osiris Players, speaking of her 7 years' experience of acting in schools to child audiences, said that her company met the same problems as the schools. If they presented Shakespeare with complete sincerity children loved it, however primitive the setting. But if they were to begin being pompous or "elocuting" to them the children would laugh. If they were inaudible the children, unlike adults, would talk. In the training schools, the students should be told what the problems were and left to work out the solutions for themselves. She was sure that an audience was an essential part of the acting.

Miss Rennie expressed, what appeared to be a general view, that the elementary school teacher, for financial reasons, would not be able to undergo a special period of training after finishing the ordinary training, but sug-



SCENE FROM "LA PAIX" BY FRANCIS
 PORCHÉ, FROM "THE PEACE" OF ARISTO-
 PHANES, ENGLISH VERSION BY OSSIA
 TRILLING AND EMANUEL WAX,
 Produced for the Royal College of Art
 Theatre Group by John Burrell, with
 scenery AND costumes by the producer.

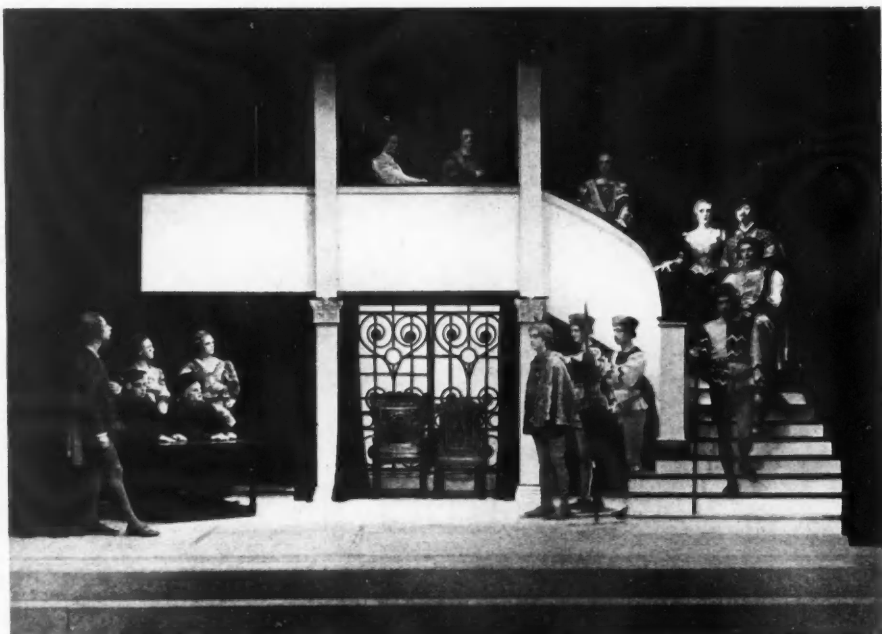


Photo: Ramsey & Muspratt.

SCENE FROM "THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY"
BY CYRIL TOURNEUR, PRODUCED BY THE
CAMBRIDGE A.D.C.

THE SCHOOL DRAMA CONFERENCE

gested that there might be some practical test for those who produced plays.

Miss Gulick said that it was possible to take the L.R.A.M. or even the Guildhall teachers' diploma after six months, and that they could be taken from the evening classes. They gave at least some technical knowledge, if not actual experience in dramatic production. It was important, she added, that in the producer's training, speech should be considered. They must know how to make the children audible without straining.

Mr. Dyer said that not one of the 500 boys in his school spoke the received standard. An oral test would be no more than a test of social standard. He did not agree that boys' tastes were vitiated by the cinema. In the provinces the standard of the cinema was higher than that of the local stage.

Mr. Bradshaw (Lewes County School), said that the modern universities had amateur producers as a rule, and they were more interested in modern than classical drama. The amateur producer had had no training but experience, but the standard was often extremely high. Anyone who was going to produce in a school needed experience in production, which only one in a hundred would get as a member of a university dramatic society. They should try to get local authorities to realise the importance of drama. Schools were being put up all over the country without a built-in stage.

The Chairman said that he would like to see drama part of the school work, but it could not be made so until some use was made of it in the examinations. Where the enthusiast was vulnerable in a school was in the possible charge of absorbing the energies of boys in dramatic work that should be given to other subjects. He thought some compromise might be made by which an oral test of a few minutes on the speaking of dramatic speech might be made part of the examinations as in music and modern languages.

Mr. Taylor, speaking for the Headmasters' Conference and the Incorporated Association of Headmasters, said that the question of an oral test of any kind in English had been discussed recently and there was the most uncompromising hostility to any test. One of the main reasons was that many schools would find the greatest difficulty in passing such a test. The status of a school as regarded speech might decline, and that could not be helped, but it took years to improve it.

Dr. F. S. Boas, a member of the council of the League, speaking of the diploma in speech and dramatic art at London University, said that he was a member of the advisory committee on that subject and that the committee had tried to meet the difficulties of time and money which prevented teachers from taking the diploma or certificate. If the conference could send up a resolution to the University, indicating that a particular course would be desirable, the committee would certainly consider it. He was a believer in spontaneity and did not wish to regard the diploma as in any way compulsory.

The morning session was then closed.

THE AFTERNOON SESSION.

The Chairman asked the Conference to confine the discussions, at the afternoon session, to given points which might lead to action for the improvement of the standard of drama in schools.

The Chairman then put forward a resolution: "That this Conference is in favour of the League approaching London University with a view to their considering the recognition of evening courses to enable students to qualify for taking the diploma in dramatic art."

Mr. Hayden proposed, as an amendment, the word "certificate" instead of "diploma." Miss Gulick asked whether diplomas could be taken through evening courses, and was given an affirmative reply.

After further discussion it was agreed that the resolution should read "...to qualify for taking the diploma and certificate in dramatic art." It was proposed by Miss Rennie in that form and carried with one dissentient.

The Conference then proceeded to discuss whether a dramatic festival should be instituted for schools, as a means of raising the dramatic standard.

Mr. Whitworth, in outlining the alternatives before the conference said that, successful as the National Festival of Community Drama, for adults, had been, it was not an idea that he would put forward lightly or with special fervour for adoption elsewhere. The subject had been raised because, during the past five years, letters had been received from schools, some very important, imploring the League to institute such a festival. The appeals had come from north and south, from secondary

THE SCHOOL DRAMA CONFERENCE

and elementary schools, and the idea was in the minds of many headmasters and headmistresses and possibly teachers.

In his view, while it was good for adults to be brought up against hard facts by competition, it was less desirable for children to have to acknowledge defeat.

Asked how far school teams took part in the existing National Festival, Mr. Whitworth said that very few specifically school teams entered, though there were a good many old girls' and old boys' teams, and teams from the universities.

Miss Potter said, and Mr. Whitworth agreed, that the school team would not normally find itself in the right atmosphere in the existing National Festival.

Mr. Walker asked whether there was a large entry of schools in independent festivals. In Doncaster they had had a successful festival in the last couple of months with 26 companies. There had been a school class, with five companies, and they had arranged to be judged in the adult class, securing second place. They preferred to compete in the adult class.

Mr. Dyer said that these festivals seemed to imply a limitation of the conception of dramatic work. Part of the fun of the school play was exploiting the limitations of one particular stage. Most of their plays could not be put on to another stage without being produced over again. Were they to work the whole time with an ultimate festival at the back of their minds? Would the festival encourage those aspects of production which introduced to drama and æsthetic problems the non-literary kind of mind which was one of the biggest problems of all their English teaching? Lighting and setting, the building of model stages, and stagecraft guilds were as important as anything done on the stage.

Mr. Harvey (St. Dunstan's) said that this was one argument against having a festival. One of the great advantages of the school play was the absence of the competitive element: it was so co-operative. There were other, minor points: a festival would involve undue strain on the players if the febrile atmosphere of a competition were added to that of facing a critical adult audience, and it might cause further disturbance of the curriculum.

Miss Hindley (Douglas, Isle of Man), said that none of these things need happen. In her school they had play readings and a public

performance. The festival was usually held at the beginning of the summer term and took up little time as they usually did something they had already prepared.

The principal of a National Festival was then put to the conference, but found no supporters.

Fifteen votes were given in favour of regional festivals on a non-competitive basis, and ten against, the other representatives abstaining from voting.

Mr. Whitworth then raised the question how a non-competitive festival would be organised, and outlined a scheme whereby schools might enter a regional festival but would not compete at one evening's performance. Adjudicators would visit the schools and select, say, three for a demonstration performance which could be held later.

The conference then discussed the question of visits by critics to schools, and whether the League could send experts to advise schools on their drama.

Mr. Whitworth said that this was a service which the League already offered. He suggested an extension of it which might fulfil to some extent some of the objects of a festival. Schools might enter not for a festival but for this special service. The advisors who visited the schools would issue certificates, in two or three grades. Schools would take legitimate pride in securing or working for a first-class certificate, and greater interest would attach to the advisor's visit.

Mr. Hayden thought that some tact was needed. The advisor, instead of delivering an "ex cathedra" criticism, might meet the school afterwards and discuss with them the points that had arisen in the production. The League might also publish lists of school performances over wide districts, so that schools could see each other's performances—perhaps at reduced rates for parties.

Another speaker urged that criticism was an essential completion of drama on the education side, just as the audience was essential to complete the drama as a work of art. He approved the proposed issue of certificates, and thought that those in the top class might be listed in "Drama."

Some discussion developed with regard to the cost of advisor's visits. Mr. Whitworth pointed out that a good adviser normally received a fee of two guineas, plus expenses. This, it was generally held, would be beyond

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the means of a large number of schools, and particularly of elementary schools.

Mr. Hayden said that there was often a county dramatic adviser whose services could be secured through the local Education Authority. Could there be instituted a "school subscription" to the British Drama League, which would include one visit of a critic each year?

The Chairman welcomed the suggestion of a school subscription, and Mr. Whitworth undertook to look into the financial question.

The conference voted in favour of visits to schools by League advisers, who would put the school into a class, those of the first class being published in "Drama," the scheme to be subject to a satisfactory arrangement being made between the League and the schools.

The part of the B.B.C. in helping forward the movement through school broadcasting was described by Miss Somerville, B.B.C. Director of Education for Schools. She said that about 5,000 elementary schools were equipped to listen, whereas the number of secondary schools was at present only 600. Drama had a tremendous power over the children, and they were encouraged to replay what they had heard or to build up a play on some other aspect of the lesson. Admirable work on these lines had been done informally in hundreds of schools, and it was a valuable preparation for the later work of school drama.

The children were left very much to themselves by the teacher, who acted more as adviser than as producer.

Referring again to the question of speech Miss Somerville said that the problem of a standard English still had to be faced. She had recently arranged a broadcast of children's natural dialectic speech from all parts of the country, during which "The Pied Piper" had been rendered in various dialects and then, by the same children, in "school" English. She had much preferred the dialect rendering to the "terribly hybrid" school English. What was the correct pronunciation of English? They would like to have a national body, such as the Conference represented, behind them when deciding what English should be taught.

In response to the Chairman's request for further suggestions, Miss Hewins said that she had visited 500 halls all over the country and found that architects did not know what was

needed for a stage. They should study the subject before building the new, magnificent schools. Settings, she found, were often too heavy and too expensive. Better effects could be obtained with less money if they knew what to buy and where to buy it. The same applied to lighting. Every school must find its own solution for its own particular problems. She was willing to assist so far as she had time.

The Chairman invited schools who wanted illumination of these problems to write to the League.

Finally the conference heard a spirited appeal from Mr. Haydn Davis, of Rhondda, for the provision of schools of drama in Wales. He confessed that he was feeling confused by hearing so many vital issues raised. The question of speaking the King's English meant nothing to him, for he had to deal with children who could express themselves—the vital thing in drama—ininitely better in Welsh. In Wales they had the paradox that professional drama was dead and with its death had come the vigorous growth of an amateur movement. Where were those amateurs to turn for their technical training? There was not a single real live theatre of standing throughout the length and breadth of Wales. The school teachers were the backbone of both adult and school drama there, and had thrown themselves heartily into it. The conference might consider what the League could offer that nation which, he believed, had inspiration but lacked completely the technical means of expressing themselves. The movement of a whole nation would depend upon it.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Davis for an eloquent, inspiring, and challenging speech. Speakers had been discursive, he said, as they were bound to be, and would go away with more problems in their minds than they could possibly have expected to solve. He thanked them for coming to the Conference, in many cases from long distances. They had put some resolutions and taken several votes which would guide the committee in taking practical action. He knew of no conference of that kind before, in which it had been possible to feel the pulse of the question so extensively, and he was confident that it would lead to useful results.

Mr. Whitworth thanked the Chairman for presiding, and the proceedings then terminated.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
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Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

THE Coronation festivities throughout the United Kingdom and the Empire have shown not only the loyalty of His Majesty's subjects, but have afforded yet one more proof if such were needed, of the innate feeling for dramatic pageantry which exists in the British people. How strange it is that such a nation as ours should still lack organised expression for the dramatic instinct on a national scale, But let it not be thought that we have heard the last of the effort to establish a National Theatre, nor let it ever again be said that the theatrical profession, as such, is indifferent to the idea. At the National Theatre Ball held at the Albert Hall on the night after the Coronation, a company of leading actors and actresses, drawn from every side of contemporary theatre life, voluntarily provided a pageant illustrating the development of drama throughout the ages. Not only was this in itself a delightful and even instructive scene, but it provided wonderful evidence of the solidarity of the

professional interest which is behind the National Theatre movement.

We are now able to publish further particulars concerning the coming Three-Act Play Contest which the British Drama League is organising in co-operation with the "News-Chronicle." As announced in our last number, Mr. J. B. Priestley is writing a play specially for the Contest, and this will be published by Messrs. Samuel French during July. A detailed prospectus should be available by the middle of June, and a copy will be sent to every Society affiliated to the British Drama League. From the Societies entering the five best productions will be selected for a final festival in London, to be held at the Fortune Theatre during the week beginning January 17th, 1938. It will be realised that the object and scope of this competition are entirely different from that of the British Drama League Community Theatre Festival which, of course, will proceed as usual and under the same auspices as heretofore.

In co-operation with the British Council for Cultural Relations, the British Drama League has been responsible for sending a collection of models and stage designs to the International Exhibition in Paris. This exhibit will be found in the French Section (Groupe 13, Classe 70), and though confined to the work of the most eminent designers actually practising in the contemporary British Theatre, will be found of great interest to British visitors to Paris no less than to those from other countries and from France itself. Readers are also reminded that the British Council has arranged for performances of the Vic-Wells Ballet and of "Candida" at the Exhibition Theatre during the two weeks beginning June 15th.

Besides an account of the Festival Final, the July number of "Drama" will contain an important article by Mr. Gordon Craig dealing in a highly provocative manner with Stanislavski's system of stage training.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen-Smith

"An Actor Prepares." By Constantin Stanislavsky. Geoffrey Bles. 15s.

"Present Indicative." By Noel Coward. Heinemann. 12s. 6d.

"When All's Said and Done." By Herbert Swears. Geoffrey Bles. 12s. 6d.

"The Stage Irishman." By G. C. Duggan. Longmans, Green & Co. 15s.

"The Best One-Act Plays of 1936." Selected by J. W. Marriott. Harrap. 7s. 6d.

"Eight One-Act Plays for Women's Institutes & Clubs." Pinker & Son. 3s. 6d.

IN "An Actor Prepares," M. Constantin Stanislavsky describes the training of his young students, explains his methods of stagecraft, and records the principles on which the Moscow Art Theatre is founded. It is a profoundly interesting work, full of statements and theories to which many people will hasten to give assent, forgetting or ignoring the fact that most English acting is an excellent example of all Stanislavsky holds to be false. The constant injunction to forget the public entirely, the insistence on the dominating influence of the sub-conscious, (although the author says that matters of the sub-conscious are not his field), the hatred of any form of exhibitionism—even scenery should be designed to help the actor, not to impress the public—the two hours preparation before playing, the intense imagination which must be brought to bear on every conceivable aspect of a part, the necessity for continuing to play this part in the wings and when off the stage, these and many other details, some of them not so clear and a few of them apparently contradictory, all go to make up a most powerful book. The semi-fiction form in which it is written has its disadvantages—the students are so obligingly stupid that the Director's firm and constant snubbing is more distressing than amusing—but no one could read the volume seriously without discovering that his views were permanently altered on many of the major problems of acting and production.

It would be difficult to find more tremendous contrasts than the intense, soul-searching life depicted in "An Actor Prepares," with its easily crushed, docile students, and the pleasure-loving, fantastic, egotistical world of Mr. Noel Coward's "Present Indicative." This is no book for the stage-struck—unless they wish to be struck still further. Mr. Coward has had his battles, shattering failures, and scarcely surprising breakdowns in health, but, on the face of it, it would seem a gay adventure, well worth the effort involved. Well worth it, that is, if you have the remarkable talents, perseverance, insight, and, above all, sheer courage of the author. In a sense, it is an act of courage (cheek, if you like) to write an autobiography while still young, but not only does Mr. Coward rightly refuse to delve too deeply into personal relationships, but he is consciously gentle with everyone—except himself. Here he is completely frank; successes, failures, dreams, and ambitions are dealt with rather in the manner of a surgeon diagnosing a case, and in consequence the book is never dull or stupid, and usually delightful. We are given Mr. Coward's childhood, youth (the notion that the famous cynicism is due to war scars is dealt a blow: Mr. Coward's war

experiences were more inconvenient than horrible), and twenty-one "rich, full, exciting years" in the theatre, ending with the picture of King George Vth, bowing, with unassailable dignity, from a box at the end of a performance of "Cavalcade." "Jam yesterday, jam to-morrow, but never jam to-day!" wasn't quite true of me," says the author, in conclusion, but few people after reading this record of sensitive courage will grudge Mr. Coward the jam he is able to get.

Another contrast, but not so great, is presented by Mr. Herbert Swear's amiable reminiscences, "When All's Said and Done." The book contains studies of the famous figures of Victorian and Edwardian society, and there are also some good pictures of the Bank of England, both before and during the war. Most of all we are given portraits of the great actor-managers—Irving, Tree, Wyndham, Alexander—and especially of the Kendals, to whom the author was devoted and for whom he wrote several plays. Mrs. Kendal's genius is described in glowing terms, but it is a trifle disconcerting to read that the Kendal's method was to present "an agreeable comedy, sustained by ladies and gentlemen moving with ease and apparently without effort in the atmosphere of Mayfair." After that, it is hardly surprising to find that Mr. Swears considers that an audience is always right, and that the Censor was perfectly justified in banning Granville-Barker's "Waste," and, in general, betraying some impatience with modern developments. Some of the anecdotes of famous people have point and freshness; others are explained by Mr. Swear's own words—"When you are happy and carefree, very small jokes pass current for shafts of wit." But in these stormy days it is good to have a glimpse of an infinitely safer epoch when the stage was still capable of offering a decent living and an amusing life to all but the most mediocre.

It is astonishing to find how many aspects of the drama are seized upon as an opportunity for the writing of articles, treatises and lengthy books. Mr. G. C. Duggan, escaping from official and departmental work, presents us with a fairly exhaustive volume on "The Stage Irishman," the sub-title being "A History of the Irish Play and Stage Characters from the Earliest Times." This whets the appetite for chapters which, one expects, would deal with the modern Irish drama and the vivid personalities who created it. But the days of Lady Gregory, Yeats, and Synge, to say nothing of Shaw, receive little attention; the book is devoted to minute historical researches, first, of the play written in English on Irish subjects, and then of the Irishman in British drama, both studies virtually ending with the 19th century. The author manages to make most of it extremely interesting, mainly because he is himself so interested in the subject, but the last chapter leaves us as much in doubt as ever (apart from obvious misrepresentations) as to what particular type of drama has given us the real Irishman.

Mr. J. W. Marriott again provides for us in "The Best One-Act Plays of 1936" a very useful collection of actable, well-written plays, of which one or two are outstanding. Mr. Coward's "Fumed Oak" which heads the book has twice as much vitality as the average one-act piece, and Mr. Corrie's "Children of Darkness" has power and strength, despite the fact that this kind of play, however salutary, is now hardly a novelty.

RECENT BOOKS

There is an extremely funny Welsh comedy, "A Husband for Breakfast," by Mr. Ronald Elwy Mitchell, and Mr. Rubinstein breaks fresh ground in a picture of the early Christians under Nero. Mr. Housman's "A Good Shot" lacks the true Housman spirit, and the subtleties of Mr. Brighouse's "New Leisure" would, we think, have been better developed in a story. The rest of the plays provide plenty of contrast. There is a violent but not very satisfactory melodrama, "Anoli; The Blind," by Mr. Sydney Tomholt; a vivid satire on dictatorship, "Dux," by Miss Olive Conway; an historical study of Montrose, "Nil Medium," by Miss Mary Pakington; an unequal but interesting episode of early social revolt, "The Chartist," by Mr. Stephen Schofield; a rather obvious comedy duologue, "Lady Jemima's Weekly Thought," by Mr. Leonard White; and a fantastic farce, "Refund," adapted by Mr. Percival Wilde from Fritz Karinthy, which we found extremely dull, but are quite prepared to be told that it is, in reality, a little masterpiece.

"Eight One-Act Plays for Women's Institutes and Clubs," suggests the usual amiabilities, and, having

long doubted if the W.I. movement required or deserved the feeble fare often offered to it, it was a relief to find in this volume distinct tendencies towards better and stronger work. The murder play, for instance, Miss Lal Norris' "Some Persons Unknown," has its final thrill, as has also "Idols," Miss Phoebe M. Rees' characteristic study of the French revolution. "Hunger," by Miss Muriel Smith has the correct blend of poverty-stricken misery to make it popular; "Ladies Only," by Miss Regula Burnet, is an amusing crook play; "All On a Summer's Day," by Mr. Howard Agg, is slight but should act well—this play as well as "Little White Jumbo," by Miss M. E. Atkinson, and "The Way to His Heart," by Miss Vera I. Arlett, are more in the old manner, although the Jumbo play is undoubtedly funny. It is a pity that the rollicking "Oh, Theodore!" by Miss Nora Cassara, should be spoilt by a preliminary imbecility almost impossible to swallow. This last play contains what is really the only man's part in the series; the two other males, both policemen, are seen but not heard.

"POET'S PUB"

By J. B. Atkins

EVERYBODY who uses his eyes is aware that the public houses and inns of England are being transformed. It is not merely that great road houses are being built for the motorist; in crowded cities obscure licensed houses are being changed into something new and strange and much better. We live in an age of revolution. Wealth is being redistributed quietly by taxation instead of by bloodshed; the poorest people are being steadily rehoused and already twelve million people—almost one-third of the population—have been removed from slum-like conditions to nobler surroundings. The transformation of the public house is one of the latest revolutions, and not the least.

Of course, there has been opposition to this particular revolution as everybody who has attended brewster sessions knows. There is a relatively small but very active group of people who believe that they are serving the cause of temperance when they can prevent a public house from being raised to a higher level. They are Prohibitionists at heart, and prefer that the public houses should remain in disgrace in the desperate hope that one day they will be abolished out of sheer disgust. This is a sad example of obscurantism. If the public houses were abolished worse sorts of drinking than any with which public houses are associ-

ated would spring up. The public house is everybody's house, an indispensable thing, and it is the natural and statutory means by which the authorities can exercise all the necessary control of public drinking. Fortunately the licensing magistrates have learned from experience that, since conduct conforms to environment, the old argument about larger and more attractive houses meaning more drunkenness is a delusion. To-day most of them co-operate willingly with the owners of the public houses in bringing about improvement. The public house of the future is to be a seemly place, intended not only for the refreshment of the traveller but for the recreation of the district in which it is placed.

The significance of a licensed house in a modern community has been discussed in its most acute form on new housing estates. There are people, not all of whom are fanatics, who think that a new housing estate, with its garden-city qualities, will be much better without licensed houses. They look upon the public house as an emblem of conditions which ought to have been left behind, and they argue that in the presence of a public house other property deteriorates in value. In practice this is a policy of smugness, a policy of living to one's self without regard for the

POET'S PUB

passer-by or for the poor man whose club is the pub. It is a selfish policy because the police are always troubled and hampered when people who live in areas without a licence rush into other municipal territories in search of a public house. It would be a fine thing if every housing estate would produce model public houses of which it could be proud, and thus show lesser breeds how to live and behave. As it is, there is boredom due to the monotony of life in most of the new housing estates. Many of the residents refuse to be as happy as they ought to be; they yearn for the excitements of their former life with all its noise and grime.

What is to be done to help them? There is much talk of community centres which, if they are to succeed, must gradually become self-governing. The National Council of Social Service is taking a noble part in working and advising in this matter. No one can say what the community centre of the future will be like. But however adequately it may provide for amusement, physical fitness and cultivation of the arts, it certainly will not satisfy the average man if he cannot sit down for a glass of beer with his friends on Saturday night. The whole history of the inn or public house has made it a community centre. If the new sort of community centre kills the pub it will fail. There is room and need for both.

My own concern is with the public houses which are far more numerous than the new community centres. The spacious chief room or hall in an improved public house seems to issue its challenge and ask its questions. What purpose is it going to serve? Would not a little careful planning in the entertainment of the customers have results that would promote the whole process of civilisation? The public house, if we are really a civilised people, must have the stigma removed from it; it cannot possibly remain the one deliberately unredeemed institution. I would say, let the intellectual planning be on as high a level as possible. Why should we be afraid? There is some evidence behind the belief that the power to appreciate great poetry and great drama among the least educated people has been under-estimated. No doubt it would take a long time to build up all over the country something corresponding to the Old Vic tradition but a new opportunity is plainly before us.

As I listened recently to a broadcast entertainment entitled "Poet's Pub"—the title was borrowed, I suppose from Mr. Linklater's novel—which was conducted by Mr. W. B. Yeats, I wondered whether some such entertainment might not be offered in the halls of our modern public houses. It is no criticism to say that the B.B.C. does that kind of thing already and that everybody has a wireless set. To listen in in one's home and to be entertained while meeting one's friends at an inn are not comparable things. You may like one or the other, or you may like both. An entertainment in which an expositor would tell the audience about particular poets and what they had tried to do in particular pieces of verse, and in which a competent speaker would recite the pieces, with pauses between each—for drinks of you like—might gradually become popular and valuable. It would certainly be a new form of entertainment and would be one, I imagine, in which the amateur could do as well as the professional.

I have heard at Universities amateurs declaim great verse supremely well. They had been trained in rhythm, scansion and the proper value of words, but I would not pay them the compliment of supposing that most of them could act tolerably. One good point in this proposed entertainment would be that it definitely would not, or need not, compete with the professional theatre. If it raised the standards of taste the result could be nothing but benefit for those professional companies which perform reputable plays in neighbouring theatres. Matthew Arnold wrote: "The theatre is irresistible; organise the theatre." Similarly I might say: "The public house is irresistible; organise the public house."

* * *

I have dwelt upon the speaking of verse because in an organised form it might break new ground, but the whole argument applies of course, equally well to the proper function of the British Drama League which is the production of plays, and the more the better. My purpose has been to suggest the steps which might be discussed more appropriately in "Drama" than anywhere else, towards making our public houses worthy of a civilised people.

ACTIVITY AT CAMBRIDGE

By Elinor Loring

THE Arts Theatre—a charming interior, and for its own sake, worth a visit, as an example of a well planned and well built little theatre—and incidentally the scene of the B.D.L. Eastern Area Finals—began their productions last term with Shaw's "Millionairess." Lopokova as Celestine in a new translation of the "Misanthrope," by Elizabeth Duncan-Jones, produced by Robert Atkins and exquisitely dressed by Derain followed—afterwards to be transferred to London. Then a welcome and long overdue visit from the Abbey Theatre Co., who gave a rare example of long standing and perfected team work, both in their former repertoire—"The Playboy"—"New Gossorn"—"Juno"—"The Rising of the Moon," and in the first performance here of Yeats' "Words upon the Window Pane" for which we were, though disappointed, duly grateful. They further introduced a new playwright in "Katie Roche," by Teresa Deevy. Amateur producers and playwrights should study her work. Her sure sense of character is very subtly conveyed by means of reserves and by suggestion rather than in direct statement; and was it not for the first time in contemporary theatre history that a middle aged spinster was presented, in whose reality we could find belief. A careful and delicate study.

Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson brought Miles Malleon's "Six Men of Dorest" and were excellent in what the critics discovered to be a sentimentally tendentious and banal piece; nevertheless a reminder of this not to be forgotten event of Tolpuddle in theatrical form proved both acceptable and popular.

The Festival Theatre suffers by reason of its position outside the town but under the direction of Mr. Alfred Huxley it has given a good varied repertoire of plays written with assured and competent technique and supplying particularly the needs of those who like to find what they expect in the polish and finish of a West End play. They gave "London Wall," "Ambrose Applejohn," "Rain," "I lived with you," "While Parents Sleep," "Dangerous Corner," and "The Torch Bearers," and are now proceeding to an interesting experiment in the form of a club with special Sunday performances which during the Summer term includes "The Old Ladies," and "Desire under the Elms."

But it was at the A.D.C. Theatre,—though, except in the case of "The Revengers Tragedy" jointly with the Marlowe Society not under the auspices of the A.D.C.—that the most gallant and interesting work was accomplished. There were two performances of a dramatised version of Pushkin's "Queen of Spades" courageously produced under unusual difficulties by Robert Graham for the C.U.S.R. as a centenary celebration of the poet's death.

The C.U. German Society produced the "Urfaust," a bold venture, their beautifully and skilfully designed set by a pupil of Professor Preetorius was universally admired. The C.U. Mummies presented "The Rivals" and the sallies aimed at pretentiousness and preciousness are by no means obsolete to-day, but not only is the play hopelessly constructed at the close, but the rhythm of speech is alien now to the English ear. Alien also the lusty blustering rhetoric of Elizabethan English in the "Revenger's Tragedy" but what revelation of the possible magnificence of our speech and of poet's passion yes, and poet's vision too, of human depravity bringing real horror at moments where at plot and action one could only smile. The sudden hearty outbursts of laughter from the less restrained section of the audience was the true and natural present-day reaction, but with this added difficulty for contention by the players, I found more cause than ever for admiration and respect.

Finally the dramatised version of Handel's "Saul" at the Guildhall must be mentioned from this aspect alone. Skilfully arranged upon a stepped and terraced stage, cunningly lit, entrances and exits—a difficult problem in crowds so large satisfactorily achieved—the whole provided an eyeful of gorgeous and effective sumptuousness which perfectly accorded with my range of understanding of this master musician's work. Delightfully 'pseudo' from a Biblical standpoint was the hard toe-dancing before Saul, and with a certain mingling of Jewish ecclesiastical with Restoration gesture, from the Handelian standpoint it yet seemed entirely correct. From the theatrical standpoint I am prepared to say that it knocked spots off a similar production of the kind which I saw recently. It was in fact produced with greater skill. I enjoyed it hugely together with many others, and cannot imagine how it could have been better done.



Photo: Sixtyer

"ANTHONY AND ANNA" ACT I. BY ST. JOHN
ERVINE. AS PRODUCED BY THE REPERTORY
CLUB, PERTH, AUSTRALIA.
Set devised and executed by Esmond
George.



"ST JOAN" SCENE V. AS PRODUCED AT
THE WORKINGTON PLAYGOERS' CLUB.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"OUR DRAMATIC SOCIETY."

DEAR SIR,

I was much interested to read the article on "Our Dramatic Society" in a recent number of "Drama."

It awoke the reflection that so far as I know no one has expressed that the real difficulty of the amateur movement is—that it depends on two conflicting but legitimate motives:—Do amateur societies exist for the pleasure of their members, or for the pleasure of the public?

I believe that now and in England the first motive ought to be the dominant one. But I believe that in the immediate past and in America the second motive was rightly dominant, and the amateur movement filled a serious gap in the entertainment provided by the professional stage—a gap which ideally ought to be filled by professionals, a gap usually described by the term "Repertory."

Nowadays, the serious amateur actor in the end invariably seems to find himself or herself on the professional stage and that is right and as it should be. There he competes on equal terms with the professionals.

Nor is it wholly unjust that during his period of apprenticeship he should not be paid. He learns his job in the amateur society.

There remains the great number of people who like acting but have not the time nor perhaps the talent to reach a high standard. If the pleasure of the public only is considered these people will be excluded from the boards and rightly.

But acting is a natural means of self training and self expression, and a great pleasure. Is then a society which exists by taking subscriptions from these less competent people honest in denying them their pleasure?

Some few societies do frankly exist for the pleasure of the members, and among these are Women's Institutes in their dramatic aspect.

I enclose a short article on W.I. from this point of view which you may or may not care to accept. But in any case I hope you will be good enough to print this letter. I believe it voices a real difficulty.

Yours faithfully,

MAT KITSON CLARK,

Meanwoodside, Leeds.

GRAMOPHONE RECORDS.

DEAR SIR,

You may remember that a limited repertory of records used to be marketed under the trade-mark "Octacros" and that these were not subject to the Licence of this Company as far as public performance was concerned. We now have the pleasure to inform you that the business and goodwill of the Synchrophone (1936) Company, by whom the "Octacros" records were previously manufactured, have now been acquired absolutely by our members, The Decca Record Co., Ltd.

As far as we know, there are now no records available for public performance without the Licence of this Company.

Yours faithfully,

PHONOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE LIMITED.

J. P. CARRIGAN,
Secretary.

"FROM RICHARDSON TO PINERO."

DEAR SIR,

In his appreciative review of the above book, Mr. Sladen-Smith rightly called attention to the fact that I appear to state that Aubrey Tanqueray, instead of Paula, committed suicide. Will you kindly allow me to explain that I overlooked a misprint in the proof of "He" for "She" on p. 262, line 18? *Hinc illas lacrimae!*

Yours faithfully,

F. S. BOAS.

CLIFTON ARTS CLUB DRAMATIC CONTEST.

DEAR SIR,

The Clifton Arts Club announces its Eleventh Dramatic Contest for original short plays. The Contest is open to the world. The best plays (not less than six in number) as chosen by the M.S. Adjudicator, will be produced in October next, and the First Prize £5 5s. od. and Second Prize £2 2s. od. will be awarded to the plays chosen by the judge as being the best in actual stage performance.

A Special Prize is offered for the best poetic play.

It is hoped that the chosen plays will be published under the Club's auspices and without cost to the authors.

Rules and all particulars may be obtained from:

Yours faithfully,

THOS. C. R. HITCHINGS,
Hon. Sec. Dramatic Section

8, Tottenham Place,
Clifton,
Bristol, 8.

NEW RÉGIME AT THE COMÉDIE-FRANÇAISE.

M. Edouard Bourdet, director of the Comédi-Français, has instituted more innovations than one. Outstanding is the appointment of the four "advanced" theatrical directors of Paris to stage plays at this stronghold of "classical" traditions: Louis Jouvet, Jacques Copeau, Gaston Baty and Charles Dullin. Another innovation is the asking of advice from spectators. Each member of the audience now receives a printed form which he is asked to fill in and leave with the attendant and here the long French intermission is useful! The questionnaire asks whether the spectator prefers classical or modern, historical or romantic plays; what proportion of each he would like in the season's program; what has pleased him most in the plays already seen; what time he wishes the performances to begin; would he like the usher's tip included in the price of his ticket (most French ushers are still unpaid and the tip therefore obligatory); and finally: Why did the spectator attend the Comédie-Française on this particular evening? Because he is a subscriber, or read a criticism, or was sent by a friend?

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

TONBRIDGE ADULT SCHOOLS.

On Wednesday, April 28th, the Tonbridge Adult Schools Dramatic Class presented a new play by Hartley Kent, who is also director of the group and has to her credit several plays which the class have already performed. "The Burr and the Bine" is a play dealing with the Kentish countryside, and probably many of the players, even if they had not actually taken part in Kentish hop-pickings, had certainly witnessed the harvesting close at hand. The scene in the hop garden earned well-deserved applause from the audience that had crowded into the rather primitive Scouts' Hall. The play was frankly melodramatic. The daughter of a once prosperous farmer has married a Kennington Barman; and misfortune dogs father, daughter, and drunken son-in-law, as well as a young artist couple, who had come to Jonathan Payne's farm at Hyslop Stair in order to eke out a cheap holiday hop picking and whose lives become inwoven with the lives of "Jenny Payne" and her husband. Some emotional scenes were finely written and convincing presented; and although the theme did not seem always to flow with dramatic inevitability, the sincerity of the presentation and the poetry of the words more than overcame this fault, and provided an evening of sustained interest.

It is a striking testimony to the value of drama in Adult Education that those scenes which made the greatest demands achieved the best results. At first Jonathan Payne, the old farmer, was constrained, and enunciated every word to the last syllable of recorded speech; but when the play imposed upon him a passionate appeal against the adverse powers of nature an impressive personality was revealed.

The programme did not name the players; but special mention is due to "Jenny Payne" who played an exacting part with unaffected sincerity. The Tonbridge Adult Schools Dramatic Class deserve better accommodation.

H. WESTON WELLS.

"TELL HER THE TRUTH."

This play, adapted from the original by Messrs. R. P. Weston and B. Lee, was presented by Hazel's Players on February 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th at Hazel's Theatre in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.

Hazel's Players are all members of the great firm of printers, Hazel, Watson and Viney, and the theatre, built by their private enterprise, is used most of the time as a private cinema for the employees of that firm, but a play is produced there annually by Mr. Peter Hazel, making a verdant spot in Aylesbury's otherwise arid and playless waste.

This year the play was produced as usual by the enthusiastic Mr. Hazel, who also played the leading part in it, that of "Bobby" the junior partner of a firm of estate agents, who bets his partners that he can speak the absolute truth for twenty-four hours. His clowning and burlesque were excellent, while his acting in the few serious moments which strengthened the comedy was really good and most sympathetic.

The whole cast played up excellently

DAVID TRACT.

EASTBOURNE SUMMER SCHOOL.

The detailed time-table of the Eastbourne Summer School, July 31—August 14, is now being drawn up, and will be issued within the next few weeks to all from whom enquiries are received. Except for the special lectures from the Bishop of Chichester, M. Saint Denis and Mr. Nevil Truman, the programme this year will consist almost entirely of practical work in rehearsals and group classes in order that every student attending the School may receive as much individual attention as possible. Full particulars may be had from the School's Organiser.

"THE BARRETTS OF WIMPOLE STREET."

The recent production of this play by the Addiscombe Dramatic Society, at King George's Hall, was chiefly notable for the many excellent studies on the part of many auxiliary characters, especially noteworthy being those of Dr. Chambers, Wilson, Arabel, Octavius, and Captain Surtees Cook. Of the principals, Mr. Mark Goodman gave a fine interpretation of Edward Moulton-Barrett, and, in presenting a faithful portrait of the Victorian martinet, managed to avoid the blatant sensuousness with which so many actors seem to associate this character. Of equal merit was the performance of Miss Eugenie Tuson in the part of Elizabeth, a role that was as sincere in interpretation as it was admirable in conception. Mr. Ronald Baldwin brought such vigour to Robert Browning that the effect was noisy, rather than exhilarating. Flush, appearing under the name of Judy Langley, proved herself a veritable Garbo among cocker spaniels, and joined in the final applause with loud canine approval. Mr. Frank Harper is to be congratulated on a smooth production, but he should be more careful of his grouping, and avoid that *bête-noire* of professionals, the straight line. Why he saw fit to dim down the lights on every scene, preparatory to the fall of the curtain, passes all understanding for this touch of artificiality managed to destroy much of the realism which the actors had been at such pains to maintain.

HUGH BERESFORD.

THE SECKFORD PLAYERS, WOODBIDGE, SUFFOLK.

This group of players, which had been functioning informally since 1922, was last year put on to a proper basis, the Chairman being the Revd. Dudley Symon, Headmaster of Woodbridge School and the Secretary Mrs. Alford, Selwyn House, Woodbridge. Its Autumn production was "Indoor Fireworks." At the British Drama League Festival in Woodbridge this year it was represented by two teams, one performing an original play by Dudley Symon "I cannot see what flowers," the other the first act of "The Cradle Song." It will assist members of Woodbridge School in a performance of "Twelfth Night" during the summer.

D. S.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

REPERTORY CLUB, PERTH, AUSTRALIA.

Plans for this year include twelve full length plays each presented for four nights. We have two play readings a month, a lunch-time lecture each week and a musicale each month. We have nearly 1,000 members and our own Theatre which seats 350. There are twenty-one Repertory Clubs throughout the State affiliated with our Club in Perth.

The extraordinary vitality of the drama interest in this State is further exemplified in a forthcoming Western Australian Drama Festival to be held in His Majesty's Theatre, Perth, which seats 1,500 people. The actual Festival finals will take seven nights with sections for One-act and Full-length plays, open to Clubs throughout Western Australia, and a playwriting and Radio Playwriting contest open to dramatists in any Australian State. Substantial prizes are being offered in all sections, and the widest co-operation with press, and radio interests is assured.

ESMOND GEORGE,
Director.

THE HARLEQUINS CLUB.

This very workmanlike and slick performance of Mr. J. B. Priestley's "Dangerous Corner" was such a relief after some of the dismal imitations of the original production. The play gained from the intimacy of the small theatre and the "find the culprit" house-party atmosphere was happily shared by the audience. All the climaxes and points were well put over and the exciting "curtains" nicely timed.

Setting and dresses were in the best taste, diction and delivery were good and the acting generally was of a pretty high order, especially satisfying performances coming from Anne Wilson as Freda and R. Allport-Williams as Stanton. None of the "business" was blurred and the whole production, in the capable hands of Iris Capell was efficient and resulted in one hundred per cent. good entertainment.

ROBERT MITCHELL.

FELSTED DRAMATIC SOCIETY.

"Badger's Green" was recently produced by the Society at the Memorial Hall, Felsted, and in the Grignon Hall of Felsted School...

The play proved an ideal choice and the performances were of a high standard. T. E. H. Hodgson gave an excellent rendering of the part of the shy Mr. Twigg and D. C. Riddy was ideally cast as Major Forrester. Maurice Holmes, as Doctor Weatherby, had a difficult task but he made a very good job of it. A small character sketch by W. S. Porter, as Rogers, the local innkeeper, was outstanding among the smaller parts. The play was produced by F. N. Rodgers.

"RAVENS," BY RUTH L. TONGUE.

This play, produced by the authoress, was performed by the Young Stagers Dramatic Club at Harrow on April 30th. The result justified the boldness with which they attacked an ambitious production. The dialogue of the period (1721) is hard for amateurs to handle, having something of Elizabethan complexity without giving the assistance of blank verse rhythm.

The costumes, designed by Miss Tongue and made by members of the Club deserve high praise. They demonstrated that simplicity is more effective than fussiness and that bold effects artistically massed are best. The play is a tribute to the research of the author. The dialogue recaptures intimately the atmosphere of the period and betrays the authoress' close acquaintance with the London of that time. My only criticism is that a short explanatory note on the programme would have made easier the understanding of the play's historical background.

WATFORD REPERTORY COMPANY.

The Watford Repertory Company presented Frank Vosper's fine comedy thriller "Murder on the 2nd Floor" on Saturday April 17th, in St. John's Hall, Watford, under the able direction of Miss Rose Lloyd-King. A thriller of this type needs speed and plenty of action to assure success, and this was well accomplished. The staging of such a play presents great difficulties on a small stage without the added help of modern lighting equipment, but thanks to the hard work and skill of the stage manager who is also the Stage Carpenter, and the Electrician, and there was no lack of effect and the atmosphere throughout the play was well maintained.

N. F. S.

BOARD OF EDUCATION CO-OPERATIVE THEATRE.

A modern audience has so often to suffer its pain or pleasure in silence that it literally jumps for joy when melodrama offers it a conventional opportunity to voice its feelings. That is why "Young England" was such an uproarious success. But active participation is not necessarily the spontaneous effect of bottled beer and emotion. It is often a sober attempt by part of the audience to rag the crudities of a bygone age. This privilege, however, is definitely the prerogative of the audience and in no way must the producer attempt to usurp it. In the performance of "Maria Marten" at the St. George's Hall by the above society, the production seemed uncertain whether to rag or be ragged. With the result that some of the actors played with their tongue in their cheek; others made a half-hearted attempt at seriousness. There can be no half measures in these black and white plays. Their charm lies in their deadly seriousness and the acting must be, if anything at all, full-blooded. And no amount of indiscriminate lowering and raising of lights will compensate the villain, as in this performance, for lack of villainy or the heroine for lack of heroism. The gypsy king was the only one who seemed to capture the real spirit of the play with some really good vigorous acting.

The pace which should have been brisk and almost breathless was slow, and was not improved by the very short scenes and the very long intervals. The crowd scenes which were many could have been considerably more noisy and exciting if they had been better rehearsed. The comedy touches were extremely good, and the settings quietly effective; and the music which was supplied by a full orchestra most appropriate.

The audience played their part well but it is to be noted not until after the first interval.

PHILIP L. LORRAINE.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

SECOND LONDON JUNIOR DRAMA FESTIVAL.

This Festival took place at the Tavistock Little Theatre on May 19th, 1937. The five competing teams were the finalists of competitions previously held by the London Federation of Boys' Clubs, the London Federations of Girls' Clubs (London Girls' Clubs Union), the Boy Scouts Association, the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A., and all the players were from 14-21 years of age. The standard of this year's Festival was very noticeably higher than that of last year, and the placing of the companies by no means an easy task.

Mr. Martin Browne, in his adjudication, said that "Quality Street" (Act V), played by the Mary Ward Girls' Club had considerable charm, with two outstanding performances, by Phoebe and Valentine Brown. "Double Demon" by the Red Triangle Club, Plaistow, required good team work and had got it. There were several good character studies, but a tendency to over-play in some of the parts, and again the illusion of age had not been achieved. "Brother Wolf" by the Thames Valley County School 6th Twickenham Troop was a difficult play for young people to try, but the Scouts had attacked it with real courage and had given a sincere and vigorous performance, with a very fine study in Lupo himself. "Mencius was a Bad Boy" by the Young Women's Christian Association, Upper Norwood Club, was well produced; movement, costume and speech carefully studied. For the first time a young player had succeeded in an old part, in the widow. The Stamford Hill Boys' Club in the fall of Wolsey, from "Henry VIII" had given a remarkable performance of very exciting quality; there were two especially good studies of real authority in the King and in Wolsey, and the rest of the parts had tremendous vigour and life. The grouping, movements, grouping etc. were excellent, especially at the opening.

The trophy was won by the Stamford Hill Boys' Club, the Y.W.C.A. coming second, and the Scouts third, while the Y.M.C.A. and the Girls' Club Union ran the third very close indeed.

INSTITUTE OF MIME.

The performance by the Institute of Mime, "Mime Parade, 280 B.C. to 1937 A.D." will take place on Sunday, June 13th, as already announced in "Drama"—but not at the Duke of York's Theatre, but at the *Aldwych*. Tickets can be obtained from Mr. Edward P. Genn, 10, Nottingham Terrace, York Gate, N.W.1.

FESTIVAL ERRATA.

In the list of Festival entries printed in the last number of "Drama" an indication was omitted in connection with the entry of the Brechin Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. Players. Their production of "The Lady with a Lamp" was selected to perform at the Central Division of the Scottish Festival in Stirling.

We are notified of a similar omission in respect of the entry by the Swarthmore Players, of "I have five Daughters" in the Western Area, which was selected to appear at the Divisional Final on March 20th.

SHEFFIELD PLAYGOERS SOCIETY.

The season 1936-37 has seen four productions of outstanding quality and enterprise. After a slack year following the sudden death of the Society's beloved leader, Miss Constance Radford, there has been a revival of interest and enthusiasm, several new members have made their appearance on the stage, and interest has been directed towards new and valuable work.

"Murder in the Cathedral" was produced on October 29th by Miss Lilia Hawson, with the help and advice of Mr. F. Sladen-Smith. The quality of this famous play was well sustained and the difficulties of its technique on the whole successfully surmounted. The speaking of the Chorus was especially well done, and proved, as it always does, the most impressive part of the play.

In December the Society entered the Buxton Full-length Play Festival with "The Shining Hour" by Keith Winter, produced by Mr. Sydney Ash; and came home with the Trophy. The play was subsequently played in Sheffield for the Society and their supporters, who endorsed the verdict of Buxton.

Ben Jonson's "The Alchemist" was the choice of Mr. E. F. Watling for February, and was very adequately presented by a company mainly new to Playgoer audiences. If there were no outstanding individual performances, the smoothness and balance of the production as a whole were perhaps thereby made the more apparent. The audiences were small, and reacted variously according to their degree of familiarity with the atmosphere and technique of the play; the speed and exuberance of Jonson's language proved on the whole a rather hard nut both for players and spectators.

In March the Society joined forces with the Thespians D.S. to present Helen Jerome's version of "Pride and Prejudice." The move to a larger stage and a larger scale of production was an advantage to this particular kind of play, and the loan of the costumes designed for the original London production by Rex Whistler gave the whole affair a distinction which was, for the most part, well lived-up-to by the players. Mr. W. B. Marshman and Mrs. Phyllis Ingold were responsible for the production.

On the competitive side, the Society has had a good innings. In a local festival in November, "Rococo" (Granville-Barker) won the somewhat qualified distinction of first place in the class for Plays Written More than Twenty Years Ago; and in the British Drama League Festival "The King of Spain's Daughter" (Theresa Deevy) went through to the second round at Chesterfield.

The Society has profited (artistically) by the co-operation of the Unnamed Society of Manchester, who lent their costumes both for "Murder in the Cathedral" and "The Alchemist"; but this fact, together with the remarks above concerning "Pride and Prejudice," suggests reflections on the paucity of the Society's own resources and resourcefulness in the matter of costume—a state of affairs which ought to be remedied in future years.

NOTE.

The Adjudicator in the Western Area, Southern Division, preliminary festivals was H. C. G. Stevens, and not as stated.

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